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SUBJECT: GEORGIAN TV CREWS COVER KATRINA IN LOUISIANA

1. SUMMARY: Georgian media gave intensive coverage to Hurricane Katrina in prime time newscasts and lead newspaper stories. However, the coverage was based on international wire and news agency reports, such as AP and Reuters. The exceptions were Rustavi-2 and Imedi TV. Both television stations sent special, top-flight crews to New Orleans. Rustavi-2's David Nikuradze and Imedi's Dachi Grdzlishvili reported live from the disaster zone the week of September 19. On September 25, the television stations aired stories prepared by David and Dachi on widely-watched prime time Sunday night shows: Sunday Courier (Rustavi-2) and Droeba (Imedi). Both reports, as well as the crews' collective coverage of the hurricane, were full of compassion and understanding. Individual interviews with victims put a human face on the Hurricane's devastation and left Georgian viewers saddened. At the same time, victims' stamina and determination to rebuild New Orleans were encouraging. Both reporters thanked the Joint Information Center for Hurricane Katrina in Baton Rouge, as well as the Embassy's Public Affairs Section for supporting them in their coverage of hurricane-affected Louisiana. End Summary.

2. Rustavi-2: On September 25, Rustavi-2's weekly analytical show Sunday Courier featured David Nikuradze's story shot in Louisiana. The piece used graphics prepared by FEMA to show Katrina's trajectory and how the storm crossed the most densely populated areas. "As the rescuers say, Katrina, as if on purpose, circumvented nonresidential areas to storm the places where people lived," said David. He interviewed rescuers working in New Orleans to give a full picture of the disaster. After giving background on New Orleans, its jazz traditions and economic significance for the country, David focused on future rehabilitation plans: "Post Katrina New Orleans is in great need of rehabilitation that will take a lot of time and resources. However, nothing can compensate for the incurred loss. People find it hard to understand what has caused such a great deal of casualties. People of Louisiana are wondering why the American system failed to handle this tragedy." He also gave credit to the performance of FEMA and rescue workers: "American soldiers are protecting these areas by blocking access to the flooded houses. They are also trying to save the city from looting." David Nikuradze expressed his appreciation for the Joint Information Center for Hurricane Katrina in Baton Rouge for supporting his work.

3. Imedi: On September 25, Imedi's weekly analytical Sunday night show "Droeba" (Times) aired Dachi Grdzlishvili's piece on Hurricane Katrina. Dachi compared the post-hurricane scene of New Orleans to that of a horror movie. Following a comprehensive account of the city's history, Dachi concluded by saying: "Despite the general pessimism, there are people in Louisiana who do not give up on living in New Orleans. After the sea level subsided, some people started to fix their houses and started thinking of ways to run their businesses again. Unfortunately, Hurricane Rita did not leave much hope for optimism. The dam collapsed and the city was flooded once again. People in America now talk openly about the inexpediency of building cities on the ocean coasts below sea level. When people refuse to learn from the books, nature gives its own lessons."

4. Dachi Grdzlishvili sent a letter of appreciation to Post for assisting him with his trip. An excerpt from the letter: "The Public Affairs Section of the U.S. Embassy in Tbilisi put us in touch with Gregory Franklin, Senior Advisor for TV broadcast at the U.S. Department of State, currently acting as media coordinator at the Joint Information Center for Hurricane Katrina. It was a nice surprise for us that Mr. Franklin came to see us at the airport. From there, he escorted us to all of our shoots. On behalf of the Imedi crew and the entire Imedi operation, I would like to thank the Department of State, personally Mr. Franklin, and the U.S. Embassy for the support they've provided."

TEFFT